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ABSTRACT

In 1992, Hostos Community College (HCC), in the Bronx, New York, began participation in the Bronx Center project, a partnership between government, community organizations, and private groups to develop a comprehensive urban plan for a 300-block area of the Bronx. Including civic, corporate, community, and political leaders, the Center was composed of a steering committee, advisory council, and work groups on various areas of urban planning (e.g., education, culture, and recreation; economic development; urban design) meeting regularly to develop plans and recommendations. Participants in the project were guided by the principles that planning must begin from the bottom up, planning must be interdisciplinary and comprehensive, economic and social revitalization of the Bronx Center must bring benefits to the immediate community and city, and one measure of future success will be how it provides learning opportunities for the community. The President of HCC chaired the work group on Education, Culture, and Recreation, which was dedicated to incorporating lifelong learning throughout the Bronx Center. Recommendations developed by this group included the following: (1) develop high schools with specialized educational themes; (2) use schools as community centers for adult education, recreation, and other activities; (3) allow public access to the Police Academy and Court Complex educational and athletic facilities; and (4) establish an Education Consortium to encourage cooperative efforts of diverse Bronx Center groups. (KP)

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Hostos Community College and The Bronx Center: A Model for a Community College Partnership for Urban Community Development

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by

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President

Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Community Colleges, Washington D.C. , April 6, 1994.

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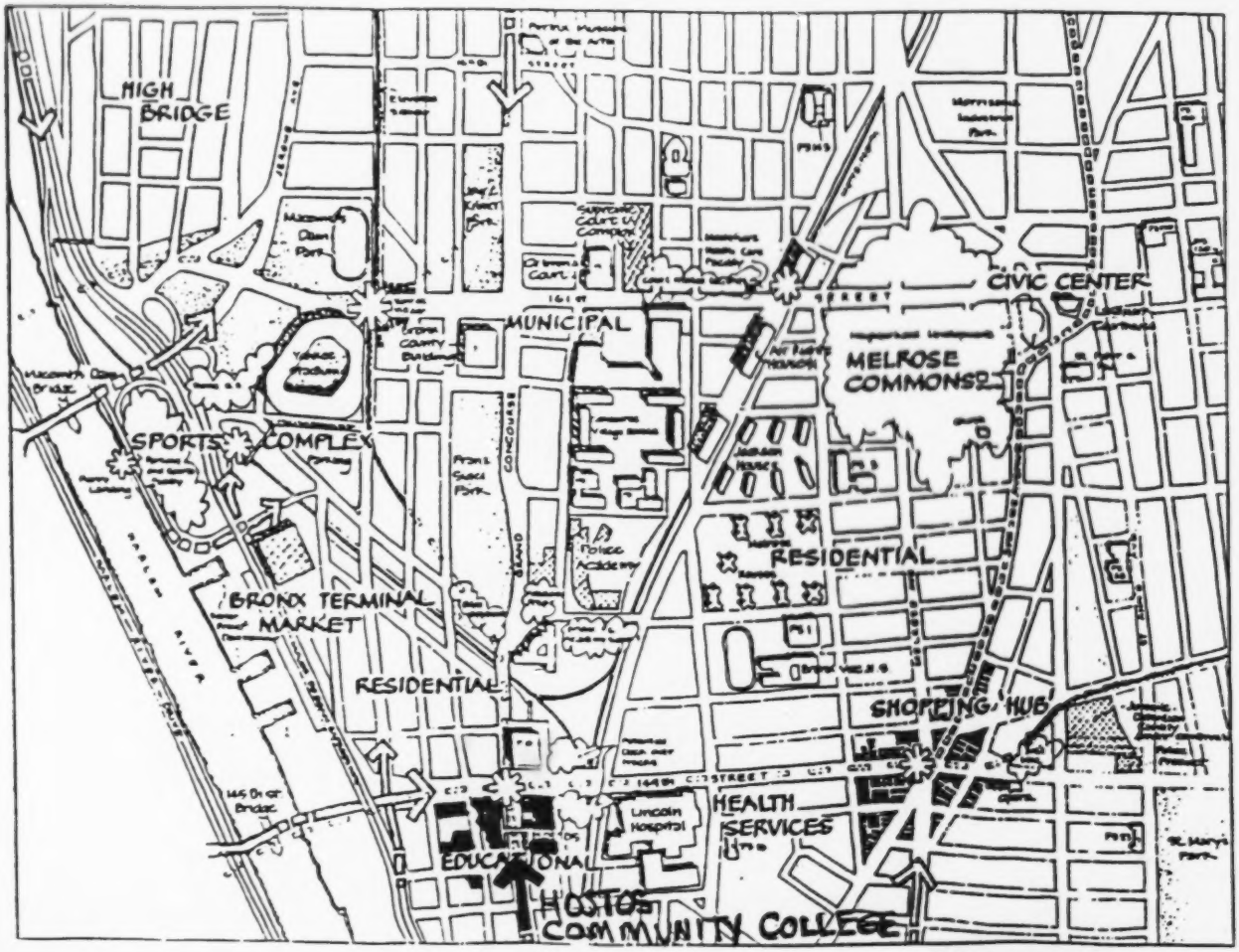

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Beginning in 1992, Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College entered into a partnership with public sector government agencies, community based organizations, and private sector groups in an exciting, innovative and productive adventure in community development and empowerment. Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer initiated the project, called "The Bronx Center," as a multifaceted effort to formulate a comprehensive plan for a strategic three hundred block area of the Bronx, roughly bound by East 147th Street and 165th Streets, the Harlem River and Saint Ann's Avenue. Including sections of the South Bronx, the Center is one of the poorest congressional districts in the country. It has been the home of Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College (Hostos) since its birth in 1968.

Today, Hostos Community College enrolls 5,400 students; 83% are Hispanic, 78% are women; 63% of all women have dependent children; 93% live below the poverty level with 86% having an average income of less than $8,000;51% are AFDC recipients (receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children; 83% enter with limited English proficiency; 43% enter with GED Degrees(all students enter with either a GED or High School diploma). Hostos is the only public institution of higher education with an expressed mission to provide a bilingual instructional program in liberal arts, allied health and technical fields.

Hostos Community College has ranked first in the country in the number of outstanding transfer students in a survey done by the College Board, "1994 Talent Roster of Outstanding Minority Transfer Students From Two Year Colleges" (January 1994). In another survey of over 5,000 colleges, published in Community College Week (July 19, 1993), Hostos was also ranked high amongst community colleges in the country; we were third in the total number of degrees awarded in public service fields, sixth in the number of associate degrees conferred on Hispanic students, and nineteenth in the country in the award of associate degrees to members of minority groups. We are also currently in the midst of construction of our permanent campus, an 160 million dollar project. Given this reality, it was a particularly opportune time for Hostos to enter into a collaborative planing process that would allow us to become incorporated into a broader community development effort in a systematic way that allowed many segments of the College community to be incorporated into the process.

The project began in May 1992, when the Borough President appointed a Steering Committee composed of civic, corporate, community and political leaders. Richard Kahan, President of the Urban Assembly, served as the Chair. I was appointed to the Steering Committee and was later named Chair of the Education, Recreation and Culture Work Group. This provided Hostos the opportunity to play a special role in building community. A wider Advisory Council was formed simultaneously to provide broad-based input. The initiative was launched with a borough-wide conference in June of 1992 at which the Deputy Mayor expressed City Hall's support and the willingness to cooperate with the project on all levels. The conference confirmed the high level of interest on the part of various segments of both the public and private sectors in participating in a planning process and support for the principles that the Borough President and the Steering Committee had put forth, including a commitment to broad-based community dialogue and participation in the planning process and a commitment to a comprehensive approach to urban redevelopment and planning. The Advisory Council was open to any members of the community, groups or corporations that expressed interest in participating. In addition to the working group on Education, Culture and Recreation, working groups were established on economic development, health and human services, open space and urban design, and transportation. Key to the success of the process in continually providing a "comprehensive"

approach to planning were three organizational components. The chairs of all the Working Groups met regularly to share with one another what their groups were considering and regularly received input from chairs of other groups to take back to each group, which in turn would incorporate these into their planning. I have seen few institutions of higher education work across "departmental" and "disciplinary" lines as I was pleased to witness in this experience. In addition, Members of all Work Groups met together a number of times during the year to give reports on their progress and to raise questions and concerns about matters that needed input across the Work Groups. Finally, as needed , expertise, and advice was made available to work groups by staff of three of the participating organizations.

An outgrowth of the process was a comprehensive plan and report presented to the Bronx Borough President in May, 1993. A great deal of progress has been made on many of the plans and recommendations incorporated in the report -- testimony to the effectiveness of the process. I would like to share the overall model of this initiative as it offers a great deal of substance for thought for other urban community colleges as they struggle to engage in viable working relationships in their communities. There are no simple solutions to the complex urban problems faced by our colleges and the students and communities we serve. The solutions are always complex and require a shared vision and a strong collective will to be successful. The fact is that there is no "completion date" set for the Bronx Center effort. Those

of us in leadership positions must begin with the clear understanding that change will be a constant throughout our lives and constant reality for the communities we serve. We must always be part of a constant "building" process if we are to create and maintain viable and vibrant communities in the years to come, be it in the South Bronx, or any other urban community in the country. What is important is the process and the hope that is generated by its successes. In this regard, Hostos Community College is committed to maintaining a prominent role in understanding the community it serves and its needs and aspirations and in participating in the solutions to its problems. It will continue to anchor its own work on collaborative working relationships and participational planning processes, both internally and externally, that develops civic responsibility and helps rebuild civic life.

The final report to the Borough President included hundreds of recommendations. I will focus my remarks on the work of the Education, Culture and Recreation Committee which I chaired because of its direct interest to all present. However, I must be quick to add here that in so doing I will need to limit my remarks to fit into the time allotted, though the overall effectiveness of this effort can be attributed to precisely the inclusiveness and breadth of the planning process. For the College, the Bronx Center initiative offered the opportunity for us to serve for the first time as a base where neighborhood leadership convened to discuss the broad spectrum of community

problems and needs, and to be perceived as a place in which solutions were sought through the exchange of ideas from a broad spectrum of people from college scholars and leading community small business persons to residents of homeless shelters. I will begin with on overview of the effort and highlight key aspects of the process, each of which was critical to the overall success.

Guiding Principles

Four basic principles embody the values, desires and hopes of the people of the Bronx that participated in the effort. These principles provided a conceptual framework for the Work Groups and for the preparation of our report and served as a sound foundation for continuing the Bronx Center process. The first principle is that effective and meaningful planning must be the product of a "bottom up" community-based process. Planning based on this principle holds the most promise for long-term benefits for all members of the community.

Secondly, planning must be interdisciplinary, comprehensive and integrated at every stage. Planning cannot succeed if it is carried out within the artificial confines of a single social or economic discipline. The renewal of the area's physical infrastructure is integrally linked to the development and delivery of new educational, economic and social opportunities for Bronx residents. The human agenda must form the basis for an agenda of physical renewal.

Thirdly, the economic and social revitalization of the Bronx

Center area must bring benefits to the immediate community, the Bronx, and the city as a whole. As both a process for social and economic advancement and a place for physical redevelopment, the Bronx Center will serve as an economic engine for the borough as a service-providing center that will influence an area far beyond its nominal boundaries. It must provide the education, training and access to capital needed for full participation in the economy of the 21st century, must demonstrate the ability to make a marked improvement in the delivery of health and human services, and must result in the creation of significantly more recreational and cultural opportunities than are now available.

Finally, participants in the Forum agreed that one measure of the future success of the Bronx Center will be how effectively it provides learning opportunities both for residents and for others who work in the area. Consequently, consensus was reached across all working groups that all projects, whether in economic development, housing, education, health or human services, must multiply opportunities for learning and training, stressing cultural diversity and inclusiveness.

Education can no longer be seen as the job of traditional schools and colleges alone. Virtually all institutions and community groups, including libraries, museums, parks, churches, hospitals, courthouses and businesses, must act through cooperative efforts as vehicles for lifelong learning. As Chair of the Committee, and President of Hostos Community College, I helped establish a solid footing for the College to play a

leadership role in "redefining" the broader community's perception of the College and its role in the context of the planning process. Rather than being "territorial," the College seized the opportunity to broaden everyone's view from a narrow and often traditional one to a broad one that defined all institutions as educating institutions.

The Bronx Forum

Community outreach and citizen participation in every aspect of planning and development have been a critical part of the process from the outset of the Bronx Center initiative. Input from the whole community, not sporadic, but ongoing, empowers residents who have stayed in neighborhoods during difficult times and restores public trust in government and the planning process as vehicles for positive change. Without broad and intensive public enthusiasm, no development plan can survive the political hurdles of planning and funding decisions that lie primarily in the hands of city, state and federal officials. Without wide popular support, private sector and community groups will not take the many future actions that are necessary to ensure the success of the plan.

Therefore, the Bronx Forum has been established as the primary vehicle for ongoing public participation and engagement in Bronx Center policy, planning and development. The Forum invites all Bronx residents and others who have participated or will want to participate in some way in the Bronx Center process.

Every effort should be made to involve youth in the work of the Forum. The Forum meets regularly to discuss issues of immediate or long-term interest to the community, to receive and discuss community concerns and to initiate and react to proposals, plans and projects for the Bronx Center. Hostos Community College is the location of many of these meetings.

Work Group on Education, Culture and Recreation

The Work Group of Education, Culture and Recreation dedicated itself to incorporating a concept of lifelong learning across all existing and planned institutions and structures of the Center. First, efforts were made through meetings of the leadership of the key institutions to explore ways in which to more effectively communicate and coordinate our work across all institutions and then moved to discussions around the design of new structures, facilities and programs. This was the first time that a broad base of institutions, government agencies, CBOs, churches, youth groups etc., etc., had worked together in this way in the South Bronx.

The creative and performing arts play a unique and needed role in our society. The Bronx Center should encourage and nurture productive, autonomous and financially stable artists, arts presenters and producers, together with arts-related small

industries.

Existing recreational and cultural facilities in the Bronx Center should be made fully available and put to full use. This will require new resources and sustained cooperation among institutions, government agencies and public and private groups. Toward this end, the Committee recommended the establishment of an Education Consortium to ensure a mechanism for on-going collaboration of institutions and groups. In addition, a number of specific projects were recommended including the following:

Projects

New High Schools. New public facilities with specialized educational themes and in partnership with existing institutions must be built. As noted in the Economic Development section, one new high school specializing in sports-related educational opportunities should be located near Yankee Stadium. The new Police Academy and the planned Court Complex on East 161st Street should also include major high school components, offering concentrations in criminal and social justice and allied fields.

Schools as Community Centers. Schools must become centers for adult education, for recreation and for other community activities after school hours, on weekends and during the summer. This will require partnerships between schools and community and private-sector organizations. Both children and adults must be assured safe access to schools as a prerequisite for using schools as community centers or for classes. Greater police

presence is needed to ensure the safety of individuals as they travel between their homes and schools.

Police Academy. In addition to high school classrooms, the new Police Academy should include features and offer programs to ensure broad community access that will effectively incorporate it into the Bronx Center. The public should have access to Academy athletic facilities, space for community meetings and training in community policing, and library services.

New Court Complex. Similarly, the educational needs of neighborhood residents and businesses must be considered in the planning of the new Court Complex. Its public education components should include classrooms for high school and adult education in law and criminal justice, and library facilities.

Education Consortium. To encourage the cooperative efforts of diverse Bronx Center groups, a consortium including leaders of educational, cultural and recreational institutions should be set up as a coordinating mechanism for planning and resource-sharing.

Arts Development Consortium. Arts organizations should form a consortium to pursue joint fundraising, to explore complementary arts programming and to find ways to attract new and broader audiences.

Arts-Related Industries. The potential for developing arts-related economic enterprises in underused existing buildings with good road/transit connections to the surrounding region should be studied.

Conclusion

The four other working groups also clearly defined the principles that guided their work together with the specific recommendations. These are available in the final report and we would be happy to make them available.

This is a complex and ambitious agenda, but one we believe can be realized. Over the next year, we will work closely with the Bronx Forum, the Borough President's Office, the Mayor's Office, community organizations and Bronx residents to broaden community participation, implement near-term projects and expedite long-term plans.

The continued involvement of every member at the Bronx community is essential to shaping and realizing the potential of the Bronx Center. While the socio-economic reality may in the short term, be defined as one of poverty in the South Bronx, there is no lack of courage, absence of collective will, shortness of vision, on the part of the people of the Bronx that we are privileged to serve. We have amongst us the true "bricks and mortar" --the courage and the spirit that will be needed to make the shared vision of the Bronx Center a reality.